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ABSTRACT

THE PROJECT, PUEBLO INDIAN EDUCATION TALENT SEARCH PROJECT, IDENTIFIES PROBLEMS RELATED TO INDIAN SUCCESS IN COLLEGES. THESE PROBLEMS, LISTED IN ORDER, ARE (1) POOR COMMUNICATIONS (SPEAKING, HEARING, AND WRITING ENGLISH); (2) IMPROPER STUDY HABITS IN THE FIRST YEARS; (3) LACK OF ORIENTATION TO COLLEGE LIFE; AND (4) THE MINORITY COMPLEX OF THE INVISIBLE MINORITY ETHNIC GROUP. IT IS SUGGESTED THAT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE WOULD BE MORE ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THE INDIAN STUDENT THAN A LARGE UNIVERSITY SINCE THE EMPHASIS IN THE SMALLER SCHOOL IS ON MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE STUDENTS AND NOT ON RESEARCH. IT IS ALSO NOTED THAT THE HEAVY EMPHASIS ON COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE PROVIDED AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE IS DESIRABLE FOR THE INDIAN STUDENT, ESPECIALLY IF A COUNSELOR WITH AN INDIAN BACKGROUND CAN BE HIRED. (DK)

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# TEACH INDIAN STUDENTS TO SUCCEED

By Joe S. Sando

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This article was prepared as a result of problems identified through a program sponsored by the All Indian Pueblo Council. This program, called PIETaP, Pueblo Indian Education Talent Search Project, was instituted to furnish guidance and counseling service to Pueblo Indian college and university students. Although the project proposal as originally conceived involved working with students of higher education only, it soon became apparent that the root of the evil extended to the secondary schools. Hence, from the college students themselves the suggestion was relayed that the services be offered the senior high school students, sophomores, juniors and seniors.

This came about due to the unfortunate situation of a Counselor-Student ratio of 400 to 1 in the public schools of the state. Of course it varies from school district to school district, but in general, our students claim they rarely saw a counselor until their senior year in high school.

PIETaP worked with officials at the State universities and also Ft. Lewis College at Durango, Colorado. The universities in the State are: Highlands University at Las Vegas, College of Santa Fe, University of Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, Eastern New Mexico University at Portales, New Mexico State University at Las Cruces, Western New Mexico at Silver City, New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology at Socorro and the State University Branch

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college at Grants.

The high schools that PIETaP is working with are Taos, Penasco, Espanola, Santa Cruz, St. Catherines in Santa Fe, Pojoaque, Santa Fe, Institute of American Indian Arts, Bernalillo, Jemez Valley, Rio Grande in Albuquerque, Los Lunas, Laguna-Acoma, Grants and Zuni.

## The Problems

Other than the usual slight homesickness by first year college students for a few days, the problems of the Indian students appear to be, in order: (1) communications, speaking, hearing and writing. This further causes failure to take classroom lecture notes. (2) proper study habits in the first years and related use of leisure time, (3) lack of orientation to college life and (4) the minority complex of the invisible minority ethnic group.

These problems are experienced by Indian students who learned English as a second language. There are many Indian students who use their tribal language as a second language and there are also many who do not understand their tribal language at all.

## Communications

The American school system was created for the middle class English-speaking American. All future teachers of American public schools, private schools and Parochial schools are taught to teach in the English language. No allowance has been made for the student who does not understand English. Achievement standards have been set for the student as if every student understood English. Those who cannot understand English sufficiently cannot possibly achieve

in the classroom. If the student continues to fail to achieve then the classroom is not the jolly place for a happy student. We are then creating a future drop-out. The head-start programs have made a great start in trying to reduce the problems of Indian students communicating in the language of the classroom. However, there are further obstacles in the near future. In about the third to fifth year of school, depending on the individual, the Indian student is hooked by another problem. This problem is cultural difference and environment. Indian college students have said that an Indian environment is not very conducive to ambitions for higher education. This is probably so, as Indian communities are usually not represented by the professionals---doctors, lawyers, scientists, etc. There is not a professional model in the community to look to for advice or excite one toward a like career or goal.

English as a second language is beginning to be introduced to speakers of non-English language. Much water has passed under the bridge and today our government is spending untold millions to reclaim some of these former students with an aborted educational career. Yet, are our colleges preparing the teachers to assist Indian students to succeed?

The majority of our Pueblo Indian students attend a public school near their home. And as such these students are exposed to the English language on the average of five to six hours a day. The rest of the time they are in an environment where the vernacular is the Indian dialect. One person may think, isn't that

enough? No doubt many of you have studied a foreign language and are familiar with the second language problem. I have known many scholars who can read and write a second language well but could not speak it after two years of high school and four years of college study. But the Indian child is suppose to achieve in a strange unfamiliar language and compete no less with other students who speak only the English language.

Yes, we have observed that the problems of Indian students in the universities are similar, although they were not only under different professors but different colleges and geographic locations. The problem was due to the unfamiliarity of the English language, or communication.

Study Habits

Second year college students have often told us, "Gee! if I had only known enough to settle down and study last year then I wouldn't be battling this low grade point average also."

As a rule many of our Indian students do not enter college with a background of good study and copious reading habits. Thus, they must learn these as a requirement.

And why do they not have study habits and reading habits? For the simple reason that they never have had these seemingly common experiences. We may ask why again. Well, there is the problem of housing. Indian families are growing rapidly and new housing construction is not keeping up the pace. The federal government has a housing program under Housing and Urban Development: couldn't

they take advantage of this? I shall mention the invisible minority later but it appears here already. When the housing bill first appeared the invisible Indian did not qualify. Indian leaders had to appeal to Senator Clinton Anderson of New Mexico to amend the housing bill to include two words, "and Indians". So we finally qualified. Consequently, eight Pueblo villages, Isleta, Sandia, Cochiti, Tesuque, Pojoaque, Nambe, Santa Clara and San Juan now have new HUD housing or are under construction. Other Pueblos will soon have their proposals approved so work can begin. But when you work Federal programs one must be patient and hope for the best. To make the story short, the Indian people need housing so the students can have their own rooms to study in.

And as I have said, the majority of our students attend public schools near their homes. The students are transported by buses daily. The buses run on schedule and if a student was in the library when the bus left, he or she can look forward to a long walk home. So reading for research or pleasure in the library is out. Our Indian students do study and read but usually under a handicap. And in the college scene these practices are plentifully available but when one has studied only a little bit in the past, then the amount of reading and studying required in college will be difficult.

College Orientation

Few Indian students visit college campuses before they enroll. When a student from the Pueblo comes to the large urban-oriented campus, the student is promptly lost in the sea of people and buildings.

We suspect that this phenomena may contribute to higher attrition rate in the larger universities. The large schools are so big for the Pueblo youngster that the schools seem unfriendly. In the smaller schools, when the student makes a low grade everyone in the faculty and staff known to the student becomes concerned. The house mother to the Indian Club sponsor begins to encourage the student to try harder or suggest study. In the large institutions the professor may never know that there was an Indian student in his class and not doing well at this time---invisible minority.

Minority Complex

Social scientist enjoy describing the so-called mimority races to explain the basic human problems that involve various non-Caucasian races. A big word, culturally disadvantaged, is often used to pinpoint these various minority races. Well, we can say that any one who describes a Pueblo Indian as culturally disadvantaged has just arrived on the Mayflower and has not been on the scene very long yet. Culturally speaking, the Pueblos have more to offer the student than our numerous fads in the dominant society of America. So we are not culturally deprived or disadvantaged. We may not be of the minority races either, but the "invisible minority". The Black people and the Spanish-speaking people are often called minority people. But we know they each number into the millions in population. But for the American Indian there are only some six hundred and forty thousand (640,000), including the non-Indian "Indian-extras" in Hollywood.

We feel that there is another phenomenon around or about the Indian, which we shall call the "minority complex." How many Indians have run for political offices in our state? Not very many. This for the single reason that there are not many Indian voters.

Nationally, the Indian vote is invisible. A block vote by Indians would be insignificant. Congressmen would be influenced more by sumpathy or a guilt feeling due to past treatment of Indians than would the influence or meaning of the Indian vote.

There are few universities which have an enrollment of over one hundred American Indian students. The minority feeling is here. A Psychologist once made a report of a study of Indian high school student's values. Among the answers noticeable were that they did not consider themselves important. Another was that they didn't think they could influence anyone. Also that if one ran for office there would not be enough Indians to vote for the person. Is this inferiority or minority complex?

Congressmen pass bills and many have been anti-Indian. But the members of Congress who do speak for the Indian with authority are usually in the minority and are out-voted. Forces contributing toward the minority feeling are omnipresent. It is difficult to describe the feeling to people who are not affected. I don't think the black people can describe to any of us the inherent feeling of discrimination as they experience it.

Now what can we do for the Indian student who wants to succeed in higher education? For many years now, the Indians have had Generals fight their wars. Today there are many educated Indians

who can express the views of their people. The views that are being expressed by Indian people are not theories picked up in the classromms. They are views of problems they wish to see solved. Many of these are not special Indian problems. They are basic human problems that involve Indians.

With this background, let us proceed to examine what the Indians want. If there are novel innovations there may be resistance to change. The resistance is not only from so called conservative Indian people but from college professors also. An example is the recent attempts to institute Afro-American Studies and Mexican-American Studies courses and the adequately attested feet-dragging exibition of the faculty in colleges.

We should suppose that the Indian parents and leaders would desire earnestly a department in our higher education system that would assist Indian students to succeed. To join the mainstream of American society the "do-gooders" would advise. All the Pueblo people want is to learn to operate in our modern day society and the technological world. However, we also wish to continue to live in our Pueblo Indian world. Some academicians may question our reasoning for wanting to remain Pueblo Indians. But through the centuries our system or our culture has had a peaceful existence. That is proof enough we need not testify further.

Unfortunately, there is much to be desired in our education system today. Consequently, a better tool to measure the capabilities of the entering Indian college is needed. The common American College Test is most readily available but it does not tell us all

we want. This statement is made because in many instances the Indian college student begins to open up and compete with some confidence during the second year in college. With this view the Indian college student begins to review his goals and changes in major courses of study begin to take place. This would suggest that maybe an adjustment period is necessary for some of the Indian college students. This one year or two in the special program could be considered without lowering the standards of any institution of higher learning. After this period of adjustment the student may move toward a four-year academic program. And then there may be some who need to go toward an occupational curriculum, the trades.

With these views then, perhaps a Community College would be more advantages for the Indian student. Whatever the university is, smaller classes would be preferable. Furthermore, a class freely mixed with non-Indians would also be preferred over a segregated Indian class. A professor willing to help the student after class or one who is interested in teaching---and not research--is required.

In the Community College or General College it would be wise for our Indian student to associate with those other students who are preparing to select a major. As it has been indicated, our Indian students come from environments where professional people are rare. We would also want normal encouragement and assistance by the faculty. An air of "do or die" atmosphere would be harmful.

For sometime now, both college administrators and Indian college students have been discussing the merits of employing a Counselor

with an Indian background. There are many reasons for such a person but there are none available for eighter college nor the secondary schools. An academic advisor who would take the time to meet with his charge is also a premium. Most professors are extremely busy even with assitance from graduate assistants.

Bear in mind that our objective is to assist the Indian students to recognize and appreciate his or her full potential. There are many capable Indian people who are leaders in their Pueblos and may as well be outstanding leaders in the State. But some where along the gestalt was upset and their prerogative to exercise their ability for leadership is limited in the general dominant society.

Thus, a college program is needed to help the Indian student achieve and gain satisfaction in their pursuits.

What are the areas that the Indian students need help in? The Indian student needs help in spoken English, English composition and like the average student, mathematics. And because of the deficiencies in mastering English, listening to and taking of lecture notes is affected.

The professionals may then suggest a comprehensive tutoring program, smaller classes, if not individual instructions occasionally and maybe special faculty assignment to assist those students in need of help in a particular class.

And to complete the education of the Indian student as well as for identity a few subjects in ethnic studies. Considering the awsome lack of Indian studies, knowledgeable Indian consultants may be invited to lecture in various fields. Ultimately, this should serve to promote better relationship and greater understanding between Indian people in general and the people of the dominant society.



For any comments refer to:
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